Text: Micah 6:1-8

**Introduction**

Micah was a prophet roughly in the same time frame as Isaiah. The very first verse of the book that bears his name tells us three things. First that he was active during the reigns of “Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah – Kings of Judah.” That would be roughly 742 BC to 696 BC. So, the fall of Israel or Samaria, the Northern Kingdom in 722 would be right in the middle of his years. Micah was from a town called Moresheth. His dad isn’t named. He is not Micah ben Somebody. The combination of a small town from the extreme southwest corner of Judah and no father named gives us a small picture of the man. Where tradition tells us Isaiah is a distant member of the Royal Family, Micah is from a small patch near Somerton, just outside of Yuma. So unlike Isaiah’s work which is inside the family, Micah is the outsider. And lastly Micah’s been sent to prophesy against “Samaria and Jerusalem.” To Micah, that 722 BC fall is already so sure, it is invoked more as a warning against he South. Look, if you city folk continue acting like your cousins to the North, this comes to you also. A word that would carry a bit more sting in the 701 BC event of Sennacherib’s failed siege of Jerusalem. Failed only because God destroys the army. That failure is one of the events of the Bible that we also have an ancient Historian telling us about. Herodotus says “a muiltitude of field-mice descended upon the camp.” Micah lived in interesting times.

**Text – The Indictment/The Gospel**

And the picture he produces for us today is of a great courtroom. Jerusalem in the defendant. And the Lord himself is the prosecutor. “Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.” The fullness of the earth is called upon to be the Jury. The majesty of creation to hear the case against Jerusalem. “Hear, you mountains the indictment of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth. The LORD has a indictment against his people, and He Himself will contend with Israel.”

Other than simply beautiful language, it is worth pondering for a second what it might mean to call these things as the Jury. The biggest thing I can think is “you are not going to be able to bribe your way out of this.” The mountains have see it all and are immovable. They know the bodies buried in them. From their heights they have seen the abominations committed on them. And the foundations, the enduring foundations, the foundations that have received the blood of violence. When we go about sinning we think nobody sees. But that isn’t the case. The LORD calls forth the heights and the depths of creation to Hear.

And what is the LORD’s indictment? What is his charge against his people? It is primarily ingratitude. “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me.”

And the LORD rehearses everything that he has done. Everything which starts with their very salvation and creation as a people. “I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of Slavery.” This is the great founding act of the grace and power of God. Mountains, has there ever been before or since a people who have been given as much from the hand of God? Foundations, have you ever seen a bunch of slaves given a land flowing with milk and honey? Answer me if you have. Does the Lord keep his promises? Long after they might have been forgotten by men, does God recall them and deliver? You hills, has the Lord ever gone before another people by cloud and fire-y pillar and lead them through the waters on dry ground? Answer me.

The LORD’s grace is not limited to the signs and wonders. He is not a God that delivered from slavery and then just leaves. “I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.” By calling up these three is testimony what is God entering into the indictment? In the person of Moses God is calling up the law. God provided for this people a holy law and an example of how to administer it. In Aaron you have priesthood. How do you seek God and stay in his grace? If you have run afoul of the law where do you flee? And God has provided the specified sacrifices and worship. And he has given a model priest to make intercession before him at the altar and in the Holy of Holies. Miriam is the interesting inclusion. And maybe this is a bit of the outsider prophet’s voice. But Miriam is credited in the Exodus as being a “prophetess.” Interesting, at least to a nerd like me is what the Jewish Talmud assigns to Miriam. The first thing that Israel has trouble with in the desert is a lack of water. And God tells Moses to strike a rock and water will come. This rock in the Jewish Talmud is called Miriam’s well. And this rock – the original Rolling Stone I guess – follows Israel. Now in Numbers 20, Miriam dies and immediately Israel has no water. And that sets up the story of the exclusion of Moses. God tells Moses to prophesy to the rock, tell it to bring forth water, but Moses strikes it again. And because of his unbelief, God won’t let Moses lead the people into the promised land. I go into that story at some length for two reasons. First if Moses is the law bringer, the example of the God pleasing King, and Aaron is the priest, Miriam is the testimony of the prophet. And the water is the Words we need to hear. The second reason I bring that up is that Paul brings this very story up in 1 Corinthians and says “that rock was Christ.”

Answer me my people. Have I not given you the law, and the priesthood and the prophets? And do these, even when corrupted, even when struck by the people called into those offices, when not believed by their holders, do these things not still produce the clear water? Is Christ withheld? Is the grace of the gospel refused you?

And there is one last bit of testimony. It’s the story of Balak and Balaam. It is all in Numbers 22 and 23. You can read it on your own time. My summary is simply that a foreign King wants to hire a prophet to curse Israel. The story includes the comic relief of Balaam’s donkey talking to him, prophesying to him that this isn’t going to happen. And sure enough, what the world hired on as curses, comes out as blessings. “Oh my people, remember…remember that what the world thinks is curse, the LORD turns into a blessing on your head…remember, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

The sum of the LORD’s case is that: I have called you and saved you, I have given you everything that you need to support, and I have humiliated your enemies before you.” “O my people, answer me, how has this wearied you?”

**True Contrition/How Then Shall We LIve**

The Israel in the Dock appears to be cut to the heart at this testimony. We’ve all seen this reaction. We’ve probably had this reaction ourselves. How do I make this right? Now in our irony drenched age there is a temptation to read this bitterly, “Ok God, what do you want? Shall I bring 1000 rams for sacrifice, rivers of oil? Maybe my firstborn?” There is that temptation to read our modern sarcasm into remorse and contrition. But given the last verse of our text I don’t think that is the right answer. This is the voice of honest heartfelt contrition. I have sinned against my God: in thought, word and deed. Far from being wearied by God, I have wearied him. And deserve the judgement of the mountains. Oh mountains fall on me, oh hills cover me. What can I do to make it right?

And God’s answer to the heartfelt contrition is something that I think is usually ripped out of this context and made to say exactly what it shouldn’t.

What can I do to make it right? Nothing. Your firstborn isn’t going to do anything. If you think the rams you provide are going to do it, they won’t. You couldn’t anoint with rivers of oil someone good enough. But just like God provided Moses, and Aaron and Miriam. God has provided his firstborn. In place of Isaac, for the sake of Abraham of faith and all Israel, God provides the sacrifice. And he has anointed is son in place of Israel in the waters of the Jordan. God continues to bring his people out of the land of Slavery. God continues to give them his Word and Sacraments. Even when the world means terror, God brings blessing. We just might not see it yes. Balaam’s ass just hasn’t told the world yet. What can we do to make it right? Nothing. God has made it right?

Then what do we do?

“He has told you, O man, was is good and what does the Lord require of you. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.”

From this day, reform your steps. From this day, love your neighbor as yourself. From this day, seek the Lord and his Kingdom. And all these things shall be added. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom.